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AUTHOR Hevern, Vincent W.
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ABSTRACT

Students in an undergraduate course in abnormal psychology annually employ a cooperative active learning model to conduct a 4- to 6-day, values-oriented public policy forum (PPF) within the class itself on a general topic of concern to the field of mental health. A comprehensive and structured five-phase model for a PPF is detailed for course sections with 25 to 60 students. The model includes the following: initial preparation by instructor, orientation of students, research by student-based "study groups," forum learning and discussion in "work groups," and a final reflection paper. Strengths and weaknesses regarding this methodology are described on the basis of student (N=45) evaluations and 4 years of experience with this model's use across such diverse topics as homelessness, collegiate drinking and substance abuse, universal access to mental health care, and television and mental health. The ratings data and anecdotal evidence suggest that students regard this methodology as capable of connecting their academic efforts to a wider world and of challenging them to weigh and judge ethical and moral concerns more concretely. Contains 20 references. (Author/LSR)

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ED 406 633

Values-Oriented Public Policy Forums: Active Learning in Abnormal Psychology

Vincent W. Hevern, S.J.

Le Moyne College

Poster Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1996.

Students in a 200-level undergraduate course in abnormal psychology annually employ a cooperative active learning model [using a modification of Slavin's (1984, 1990) Jigsaw II classroom] to conduct a four- to six-day, values-oriented public policy forum (PPF) within the class itself on a general topic of concern to the field of mental health. A comprehensive and structured five-phase model for a PPF (initial preparation by instructor, orientation of students, research by student-based "study groups," forum learning & discussion in "work groups", and a final reflection paper) is detailed for course sections of size 25 to 60. Strengths and weaknesses regarding this methodology are described on the basis of student evaluations (N = 45) and four years of experience with this model's use across topics as diverse as homelessness, collegiate drinking and substance abuse, universal access to mental health care, and television and mental health.

The psychology curriculum is under challenge to adapt its pedagogical methods and goals in diverse ways. The promotion of more active student involvement in their own learning and the development of academic experiences which emphasize skills of information retrieval and application rather than memorization of all-too-rapidly obsolescent facts have been particularly emphasized as pedagogical objectives both for psychology (Mathie et al., 1993; McGovern et al., 1991) and the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum more generally (Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-Depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major, 1991). At the same time, instructors are increasingly criticized for abandoning or downplaying those aspects of the "educating act" which are concerned with character formation, moral development, and values more generally and urged to adopt a pedagogy with values-imbued objectives clearly stated (Morrill, 1980; Stanton, 1991; Thompson, 1992; Wilshire, 1990). Recent recommendations for the psychology curriculum (Mathie et. al., 1993) have emphasized a range of values-oriented goals including increasing students' ethical sensitivities, heightening student understanding of "ethnic, cultural, social, and gender diversity" (p. 170), and "providing students with the experience and understanding they will need to make the world a better place..." (p. 180).

This poster presentation outlines one approach by which many of these objectives may be addressed within the abnormal psychology classroom. It details procedures by which a "public policy forum" (PPF) is conducted annually as a major component of the author's 200-level, semester-long course in abnormal normal psychology. The structuring and implementation of the PPF grew from the author's experience as a participant in the 1992 Summer Institute on *Values Education Across the Curriculum*, sponsored by the Le Moyne College Values Program (LMCVP). The LMCVP represents a college-wide pedagogical initiative, now in its second decade, which "assists faculty, students and administrators to develop an understanding of social, economic, and political issues in ways that incorporate a serious consideration of values" (de Vries, 1990, p. 185; Kirby et al., 1990). Assessment studies have demonstrated promising levels of effectiveness for the LMCVP as a strategy for values-oriented education generally (Yaworksy & Holmes, 1991, 1992) while this PPF approach echoes certain instructional methods used in both liberal arts and business settings (Molek, 1992; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). As described below, a "cooperative learning" methodology was chosen to structure the experience of students in the PPF and rests upon an extensive research literature involving every level of educational endeavor (Caprio, 1993; Cooper, Robinson, & McKinney, 1994; Eison, Steven, & Bonwell, 1994; Temperly, 1994). This approach adapts the "Jigsaw II Classroom" methodology advanced by Slavin (1984, 1990).

Author Notes. The author wishes to express his appreciation to the Le Moyne College Values Program for its initial grant of a stipend which permitted him to attend the 1992 Summer Values Institute, *Values Education Across the Curriculum*. Discussions and critique by participants at this Institute led to the initial formulation of the teaching model described in this paper.

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Vincent W. Hevern, SJ, Psychology Department, LeMoyne College, Syracuse, NY 13201 or via e-mail at hevern@maple.lemoyne.edu

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Model of the PPF

The PPF model involves five distinct phases which are designated (I) *forum preparation*, (II) *forum orientation*, (III) *research preparation by study groups*, (IV), *the public policy forum* proper (the "work group" phase), and (V) *reflection and evaluation*. Table 1 summarizes both instructor and student activities during each of these phases. In this model, the instructor is maximally active in the preparatory stage (I), in orienting students to the PPF (phase II), and, at the end of the semester, in grading student reflection papers (phase V) while students in collaboration actively carry out phases III (research in study groups) and IV (the PPF itself structured into work groups) as well as write their individual reflections during phase V.

The choice of a general forum issue in phase I confronts the instructor in abnormal psychology with a particularly rich set of options since the course's subject matter has extensive public policy implications. The four issues dealt with in previous classes of the author have been ***Homelessness*** (1992), ***College Drinking as a Substance Use Disorder*** (1993), ***Universal Access to Mental Health Care*** (1994), and ***Television and Mental Health*** (1995). The planned topic for 1996 is ***Violence and Mental Health: What's To Be Done?***

As Table 1 illustrates, the foundation of student engagement in the PPF is the use of a cooperative learning strategy in which (1) small ***study groups*** of 3 to 4 members build expertise regarding one major topic during the two-month research phase preceding the forum and (2) larger ***work groups*** of 8 to 10 members (each an expert in a different topic area) are formed during the forum itself. This pedagogical strategy, termed the "Jigsaw Classroom" by Slavin (1990) is illustrated in Figure 1. Members of a single "Study Group" are distributed among different "Work Groups" in which each student serves to instruct other work group members concerning their specific topic of expertise. Table 2 shows how study groups have been structured according to specific topics during the two most recent forums. The PPF model has been used with class sections ranging in size from 25 to 35 students, but probably can be employed in sections of up to 60 students. During the latest PPF (1995), the Internet and a specially constructed World Wide Web Homepage were integrated within the research phase (III) for the first time (see Figure 2).

The final two class sessions of the PPF are primarily devoted to a class-wide discussion of policy issues associated with the general forum topic and their associated values. One student "Study Group" is responsible for monitoring emerging themes and noting contrasting value orientations within earlier "Work Group" sessions. These students lead their peers in the class-wide discussions and summarize pertinent themes and concerns voiced across work groups.

Figure 1

"Jigsaw Classroom" in Phases II and III of the Public Policy Forum (after Slavin, 1990)

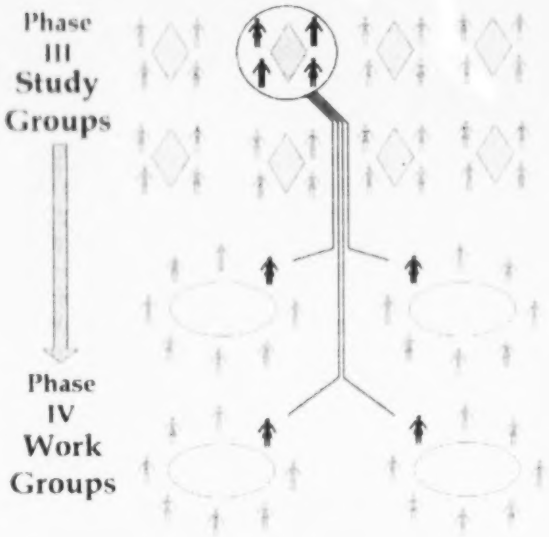

Figure 2

Television and Mental Health Webpage

Netscape: Television and Mental Health
Television and Mental Health
Selected Internet Resources
This homepage was last updated November 20, 1995
This page contains links to internet resources and some local documentation for students who are planning a public policy forum on the relationship between television and mental health for a Fall 1995 course at LeMoyne College, PSY 280 Abnormal/Normal Psychology
General Resources: Media, Television, & Psychology
Journal Search Engine
Educational Resources
PBS Video: Does TV Kill?
A Interactive Voice Media Violence is Free Speech
Entertainment Resources
General Resources: Media, Television, & Psychology

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Table 1

Structure and Activities of Instructors and Students in a Public Policy Forum

	Structure & Timing of Phases	Instructor Activities	Student Activities
I	**Forum Preparation** *When:* Before semester	• Choice of general forum issue • Reading & review of issue by instructor • Preliminary choice of study group topics • Development of orientation and preliminary bibliographical materials (review library holdings, etc.) • Initial development of web site resources • Establishment of timelines for classes • Completing physical plant or other institutional needs (e.g., reserving meeting space, etc.)	
II	**Forum Orientation** *When:* Week 3 or 4	• Description of general forum issue and format in preparing/holding the forum • Solicitation of student interests • Preliminary general review/discussion of topic in class	• In-class, small group discussion of general forum topic in response to orienting presentation by instructor • Rank-ordered statement of preferences for specific topic(s) which student will focus upon in Phase III in "Study Groups"
III	**Research Preparation: Study Group Phase** *When:* Weeks 4-11	• Assignment of students to study groups on basis of stated student interests • Consultiative research guidance to study groups • Study group meetings in 2 to 3 full period classes during 2 months of research preparation	• Study group formation & initial "brain-storming" of topic • Collaborative research on topic • Use of library database research resources • Use of internet research resources • Sharing research findings within study group (in and out of class) • Development of 10-15 minute presentation for use in the next, work group phase.
IV	**Public Policy Forum: Work Group Phase** *When:* Weeks 11-12 (4 to 6 class sessions)	• General monitoring of work group discussions and presentations • Partial leadership of group discussions	• Work group presentations of study group topics by study group "experts" in order specified by instructor • Leading discussion and responding to questions within work groups • Participation in the 2 or 3 general class discussions of forum topic • Overview/critique to entire class by a monitoring study group with follow-up discussion upon values issues and policy implications
V	**Reflection and Evaluation** *When:* Weeks 13-14	• Grading of student reflection papers	• Preparation and submission of personal reflection and evaluation paper of 5 to 10 pages

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Table 2

Study Group Topics 1994 & 1995

GROUP	Fall 1994 Universal Access to Mental Health Care	Fall 1995 Television and Mental Health
1	What is the role of mental health care providers in serving the mental health care needs of Americans?	Advertising: Goals and Processes
2	Current levels of mental health care for women	Educational Effects of TV on Children
3	Mental health care and schools: What resources are available for children and adolescents especially in the school setting?	Ethnic & Racial Portrayal: Impact upon Self-Image and Personality Development
4	Quality of care inside institutions for the mentally ill and the physically ill	Gender Portrayal: Impact upon Women's Health & Self-Esteem
5	The insurance industry: how does it deal with mental health care coverage?	Normality & Pathology: What's Normal? Establishing Expectations via the Media
6	The role of the federal and state governments in providing mental health care	Overview & Critique
7	What is the role of physical health care providers (medical doctors, nurses, etc.) in serving the mental health care needs of Americans?	Reality vs. Fantasy: TV's Impact upon Viewers' Ability to Distinguish
8	Who provides mental health care in the United States: A survey of the different professions	Television Viewing Habits & Processes
9	What should be done? (Overview & Critique) • Possible changes • Important values to be maintained	Violence on TV and Children

Research Tools and Evaluation of the PPF

Students who completed the 1995 PPF were asked to fill out a short, anonymous rating form (a) asking what research tools they used in gathering information for the PPF and (b) evaluating how well values-oriented and active learning goals were achieved. Responses were received from 45 respondents (or 69.2% of a total N of 65 across two class sections).

Students indicated a variety of research tools used in their preparation for the PPF. Almost all students used the library on campus to gather information, though less than a third of these students used library facilities off campus. Since the Fall of 1995 was the first semester in which graphical browsers (e.g., Netscape) were available for use by students in computer labs to access the World Wide Web, it is noteworthy that almost half of these students (46.7%) made use of the "Television and Mental Health" webpage constructed by the instructor for this course. Relatively few students interviewed faculty

Table 3

Research Tools Used by Students for PPF

	%age
Le Moyne College Library	0.933
Syracuse University Library[a]	0.133
Public or Other Library	0.289
Journal Articles	0.711
Reference or Other Books	0.578
ERIC Online Computer Database	0.333
Social Science Index Computer Database	0.578
Other Computer Database	0.178
"Television & Mental Health" Webpage	0.467
Other Internet Resources	0.200
Interview w/ a LeMoyne Faculty Member	0.067
Interview w/ an "expert" outside of LeMoyne	0.089

Note: N = 45.

[a]This is the only university library in the vicinity of LeMoyne College

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Table 4

Student Evaluation of 1995 PPF: Items Ordered by Mean[a]

	M	SD
(11) I would rate the public policy forum overall as a valuable educational experience	4.62	0.68
(6) Listening to other students led me to think about issues I had not throught of before	4.36	0.77
(1) Forum topic was interesting and relevant to me	4.31	0.56
(9) During forum I became aware of common themes and connections which linked up or ran across different student presentations	4.30	0.70
(2) Forum topic was appropriate for an abnormal psychology class	4.24	0. 88
(10) I felt myself more actively involved in preparing for the forum and in the actual forum itself than in the average college class	4.22	0.85
(3) Working with a group was a valuable learning experience	4.18	1.07
(8) Forum led me to think more deeply about values and ethical issues than I usually do in college classes	3.82	1.01
(7) Topics I heard about applied to questions and concerns in my life outside the classroom	3.82	0.94
(12) Generally my college classes are interesting and relevant to me	3.80	0.92
(13) I generally find myself outside of class thinking a lot about questions of ethics, values, and public policy	3.64	0.93
(15) I generally find myself comfortable and knowledgeable about how to do research in a college library	3.49	1.04
(5) My research led me to a better understanding of what's available in the college's library	3.21	1.32
(14) I generally enjoy doing library research on topics which come up in my college classes	2.87	1.04
(4) I had a lot of difficulty in finding material on the topic	2.02	1.26

Note: N = 45. Numbers in parentheses above indicate the position of the item on the rating form.

[a] Students evaluated how much they agreed with each item using the following scale:

1 = Not at all 2 = Somewhat 3 = Moderately 4 = Strongly 5 = Very strongly

(other than the instructor) and did not approach "experts" outside of the college.

Student ratings indicated very high levels of support for the PPF as an educational experience. The descriptive statistical data of Table 4 show that the summary or overall evaluation item (#11) received the highest mean rating by student participants: 4.62 (SD = 0.68) on a 1 to 5 scale where a "1" indicated no agreement with the item and a "5" indicated very strong agreement (N = 45).

Students generally agreed that the PPF provided an opportunity to experience a range of behaviors which are commonly associated with active and cooperative learning goals. For example, students noted they had been led to think about issues not previously thought about before as they listened to each other (Item #6, M = 4.36 (SD = 0.77)). They also tended to become aware of common themes and connections which linked up or ran across different student presentations (Item #9, M = 4.30 (SD = 0.70)). Students tended to see themselves as more actively involved in both the preparation for and participation in the PPF itself than in the average college class' (Item #10, M = 4.22 (SD = 0.85) while the experience of working in groups was judged to be valuable by a large majority of participants (Item #3, M = 4.18 (SD = 1.07)).

Students also saw the PPF as a learning process which stimulated their consideration of values-related issues at deeper levels than usually experienced in the college classroom (Item #8, M = 3.82 (SD = 1.01). Similarly, students believe that the topics discussed in the forum tended to have application and relevance to the student's life outside the classroom (Item #7, M = 3.82 (SD = 0.94)).

Discussion

As a discipline, psychology has been searching for an appropriate pedagogy, one that moves beyond the rote and the impersonal and stresses active and connected learning with a parallel consideration of values and ethical concerns (Mathie et al., 1993; Wilshire, 1990). The model presented in this poster offers one avenue by which both general sets of goals might be addressed. The anecdotal evidence of four years experience with this model as well as the ratings data obtained in the last year and reported above suggest that students regard this methodology as capable of connecting their academic efforts to a wider world and of challenging them to weigh and judge ethical and moral concerns more concretely.

The author notes that the PPF does entail a significant level of preparatory work for any instructor and some students clearly prefer not to work in a group setting. Further, some coverage of the "matter" within the abnormal psychology curriculum must be sacrificed due to the time constraints of a single semester. Yet, many students in the past two years have asked that even more time be devoted to the forum than the six class sessions which had been alloted. The judgment and enthusiasm of many students regarding this approach to learning -- many cite the PPF on this instructor's teaching evaluation forms as a high point of their study in psychology -- argue that the educational gain is worth both the burden of preparing for these forums and the loss of subject coverage associated when the PPF necessarily replaces two or three chapters of the typical abnormal psychology textbook.

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